

**Opening Statement**  
**by Amb. Amr Aljowaily,**  
**Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO)**  
**African Union Commission**

**before the**  
**Joint Bureaus Meeting and Consultations of the**  
**African Union Committee of Experts on Reparations (AUCER)**  
**and the African Union Reference Group of Legal Experts (AULER)**

**held Under the Auspices of**

**H.E. John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana**  
**African Union Leader for Advancing the Cause of Justice and Reparations**  
**to Africans and People of African Descent**

**9–10 February 2026, Accra, Republic of Ghana**

**Please check against delivery**

**Hon. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ghana,**

**Hon. Chief Director, Amb. Khadija Iddrisu, Chief Director, Ministry Of Foreign Affairs.**

**Hon. Special Envoy Spio-Ghabrah**

**Excellencies,**

**Honourable Dr. Jane Mufamadi, AUCER Chair**

**Honourable Advocate Kingston Magaya Ag. AULER Chair**

**Honourable Members of the Joint Bureaus of AUCER and AULER,**  
**Distinguished Representatives of Government of Ghana,**  
**Colleagues and Partners,**

It is an honour to address you at this Joint Bureaus Meeting and Consultations of AUCER and AULER, convened here in Accra, Ghana, from 9 to 10 February 2026.

Allow me, at the outset, to convey, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, the appreciation to His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana and African Union Leader for Advancing the Cause of Justice and Reparations to Africans and People of African Descent and to the Government and People of Ghana, so highly represented in our opening session by Hon. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, for the generous hospitality and for the principled leadership in ensuring that reparatory justice is advanced from vision to implementation.

**Excellencies, distinguished Colleagues,**

Our meeting takes place at a historic inflection point for our continent and its Diaspora. In 2025, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government designated the African Union Theme of the Year as “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations,” through Assembly Decision 884. With

that decision, our Union elevated reparatory justice from a moral appeal to a structured continental programme of action to confront the enduring consequences of transatlantic enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid as crimes against humanity and genocide against African peoples. This theme has ensured that reparations are no longer treated as a peripheral or symbolic issue, but as a central pillar of Africa's quest for dignity, equality, and meaningful sovereignty in the 21st century.

Importantly, the Theme of the Year firmly positioned reparatory justice as a strategic enabler of Africa's development sovereignty, political agency, and continental renewal, anchored within the Implementation of Agenda 2063. Within this framework, reparations are explicitly aligned with Aspiration 3 on good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law; Aspiration 5 on an Africa with a strong cultural identity, shared values, and common heritage; and Aspiration 7 on Africa as a strong, united, and influential global player and partner. In practical terms, this means that reparatory justice is treated as a cross-cutting enabler that underpins multiple Moonshots and flagship initiatives of Agenda 2063, rather than as a narrow, sector-specific intervention.

### **Excellencies,**

Over the last year, our Union has taken decisive steps to translate political commitment into institutional responsibility. Assembly Decisions 884 and 903 mandated the mainstreaming of reparatory justice across the whole African Union system, while Decision 913 on the convening of the 9th Pan-African Congress and Decision 934 on qualifying transatlantic enslavement, deportation, and colonisation as crimes against humanity have deepened the normative foundation of our work. Taken together, these decisions constitute the strongest continental framework on reparations for historical colonial crimes. They also remove any ambiguity as to whether the African Union treats these historical wrongs as isolated events of the past or as structural injustices requiring redress in the present and future.

### **Institutional architecture**

To give effect to these decisions, a defining achievement of the 2025 Theme of the Year was the creation of a robust institutional architecture to support the reparatory justice agenda. Central to this architecture is the AU Coordination Team on Reparations, coordinated by CIDO, which brings together departments, organs, specialized institutions, and AU representational and liaison offices in a system-wide approach. Within this framework, and pursuant to Assembly Decision 884 and Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.1311(XLVII), CIDO coordinated the constitution of the Committee of Experts on Reparations (AUCER) and the Reference Group of Legal Experts (AULER) and convened their inception meetings at AU premises from 15 to 19 December 2025.

Those inception meetings were an important inaugural step. Each mechanism constituted its Bureau, adopted conclusions and framework papers to guide its future work, and established thematic Working Groups. These Working Groups address global governance and structural reparations; economic, environmental, cultural, scientific, and educational reparations; advocacy, communication, and knowledge production; as well as applicable sources of international law from an Afrocentric perspective, the classification and qualification of historical crimes, comparative practices and modalities of reparations, and legal mobilisation strategies. Your Joint Bureau Meeting here in Accra is the next stage in consolidating this architecture, strengthening coordination, and nurturing cross-fertilisation between the two mechanisms in a manner that can inform policy, diplomacy, and law at all levels.

### **Excellencies,**

The 2025 Theme of the Year was launched through high-level engagements that underscored the indivisibility of Africa and its Diaspora, reaffirming that reparatory justice is inherently transcontinental

in character. The launch phase prioritised a global narrative shift: reparations were deliberately repositioned as a forward-looking justice agenda that is integral to development, cultural renewal, scientific and technological equity, and institutional reform, as well as to the redress of historical injustices. This reframing has been amplified through Africa Day commemorations, multi-stakeholder consultations, and academic and policy debates, affirming that reparations speak not only to the past, but also to structural inequalities in the present and the conditions for shared prosperity in the future.

This narrative shift reinforces reparatory justice as a pillar of Africa's broader struggle for epistemic, economic, technological, and cultural sovereignty. It links historical redress directly to questions of who produces knowledge, who controls technology, who sets global rules, and who benefits from the current international order. As we move into the 2026–2035 Decade of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations, this integrated perspective will be essential in ensuring that our work on reparations shapes, and is shaped by, wider struggles for systemic transformation.

### **System-wide mainstreaming and resource allocation**

#### **Excellencies, honorables, and distinguished participants,**

Another key development has been the process of system-wide mainstreaming and resource allocation. The Assembly decisions marked a shift from treating reparations as a stand-alone initiative towards positioning it as a cross-cutting priority of the Union, directly linked to Agenda 2063 implementation and its Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan performance frameworks. The Commission has initiated processes to designate reparations as a Flagship Issue and Project of the Union, with reparatory justice considerations integrated into the review of the AU Strategic Plan 2024–2028 and into the preparation of the 2027 Budget Framework Paper. In parallel, the Commission has engaged with Member States to enhance national-level mainstreaming, including encouraging them to host annual conferences and platforms on reparations, thus strengthening ownership and implementation at national and regional levels.

#### **Agenda setting and advocacy**

Agenda setting and advocacy have also been central to the Year of Reparations. Across the AU system, thematic and sectoral initiatives have been aligned with the reparations agenda, and major AU-hosted events have integrated the Theme of the Year into their central deliberations. Coordination among the African Group, working through AU Permanent Missions in Geneva, New York, Brussels, and Washington, has proved instrumental in advancing a coherent strategy. This has contributed to the adoption of key resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly that place reparatory justice at the centre of deliberations within the UN system, including through engagement with treaty bodies, advisory opinion processes, and other avenues for normative development.

#### **Strategic partnerships and multilateral engagement**

Excellencies,

Our continental efforts have been reinforced by strategic partnerships and multilateral engagement. The operationalisation of the AU–CARICOM Memorandum of Understanding on upscaling engagement with People of African Descent, and the convening of the Second Africa–CARICOM Summit at AU premises, culminated in the Addis Ababa Declaration on Transcontinental Partnership in Pursuit of Reparatory Justice. Engagement with the United Nations system, particularly UNESCO and the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, has amplified Africa's normative leadership and placed reparations in the context of contemporary challenges such as digital inequality and structural global asymmetries.

Preparations are underway to host, for the first time on African soil, a session of the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent at AU premises in Addis Ababa, which will further anchor Africa as a reference point in global reparations discourse.

The Theme of the Year has also featured prominently in Africa's partnerships beyond the continent. At the 7th African Union–European Union Summit, the Joint Declaration, for the first time, recognised and profoundly regretted the untold suffering caused by the slave trade, colonialism, and apartheid, reaffirmed support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and acknowledged the enduring contributions of Africans and people of African descent in shaping the future of Africa–Europe relations. These developments provide an important diplomatic foundation as our Union transitions from a Year of Reparations to a Decade of Justice, calling for more ambitious policy, legal, and financial commitments from our partners.

### **Remaining gaps**

#### **Excellencies, Colleagues,**

At the same time, we must approach our work with clarity about the remaining gaps. The 2025 Theme of the Year has highlighted critical structural constraints, including limited human resource capacities dedicated to reparatory justice, the need for the full operationalisation and sustainable funding of expert mechanisms such as AUCER and AULER, and the need for deeper, structured engagement at national level. At the international level, there remains an urgent need to broaden and deepen partnerships, and to mobilise sustained political and institutional support for reparatory justice within the UN system and its specialised agencies. Our deliberations over the next two days will be essential in identifying concrete, prioritised, and sequenced responses to these gaps.

#### **AUCER and AULER Future Contribution**

In this regard, the mandate entrusted to AUCER and AULER is both technical and profoundly political. As experts, you are called upon to provide conceptual clarity on the forms, modalities, and benchmarks of reparations, to elaborate innovative legal and diplomatic strategies, and to articulate an Afrocentric framework for qualifying historical crimes and advancing claims. As Pan-Africanists, you are called to ensure that this work is anchored in the lived experiences, aspirations, and agency of Africans and people of African descent, including youth, women, and communities whose voices have historically been marginalised in international law and diplomacy. The Working Groups you lead—on structural governance reparations, on economic and environmental justice, on cultural, educational, and scientific redress, and on legal mobilisation and comparative practice—are the engines through which this transformation can be made real.

Excellencies,

The initiative of the government of Ghana is highly laudable for three main reasons:

- It strengthens the link between the work of the two AU reparations mechanisms and the AU Leader/Champion on reparations ensuring coherence and linking technical expertise with political leadership.
- It enhances the coordination and nurtures cross-fertilization between the two mechanisms that were mandated as separate by the Assembly.
- It sends a strong diplomatic message, ahead of the February Summit, to the global environment that may about the centrality of the calls of reparations and justice.

This Joint Bureaux Meeting in Accra has therefore three broad opportunities before it.

- First, to consolidate a coherent continental roadmap for the 2026–2035 Decade of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations, with clear milestones, indicators, and division of labour between the AU Commission, Member States, RECs, civil society, and global partners.
- Second, to refine our legal and diplomatic strategies so that Advisory Opinions, UN resolutions, regional court decisions, and national processes reinforce one another and cumulatively shift global norms and practices in favour of reparatory justice.
- Third, to deepen co-creation with civil society, academia, cultural institutions, and communities, recognising that sustainable progress on reparations requires broad societal ownership and intergenerational engagement.

The Commission, through CIDO, remains fully committed to supporting you in these tasks. As coordinator of the AU Coordination Team on Reparations, our role is to ensure that your recommendations translate into actionable programmes across the Union, and that diaspora voices are systematically integrated into our processes.

We will be honored to continue to work with the Office of His Excellency President Mahama, with Member States, with CARICOM and other regional partners, and with the wider UN system to mobilise the political, institutional, and financial support needed to implement your guidance.

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished colleagues,**

The African Union has entered a new phase of coherent continental action on justice and reparations, demonstrating moral clarity and political leadership. The year 2025 must be remembered not only as a symbolic milestone, but as the foundation of a durable and unprecedented reparations architecture, one that gives practical meaning to Pan-African solidarity across time and space. Our collective task, as we embark on this Decade of Justice, is to ensure that we move decisively from recognition to restitution, reform, and repair—through concrete policy shifts, institutional reforms, and material commitments that address the enduring legacies of historical and colonial crimes.

In closing, allow me once again to express, , on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, profound appreciation, through Hon. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ghana, to His Excellency John Dramani Mahama for his invaluable custodianship as African Union Leader on Justice and Reparations to Africans and People of African Descent, and to the Government and People of Ghana for hosting this Joint Bureaux Meeting.

I also wish to thank each of you for your dedication and for the expertise you bring to this historic endeavor. I am confident that our deliberations here in Accra will chart a clear, ambitious, and implementable path towards a future in which reparatory justice is not an aspiration, but a lived reality for Africans and people of African descent everywhere.

I thank you.